

Secretariat Scenario

It was not unexpected of the six employees associations and their federating body at the national secretariat to display an animated interest in an awaited pay-rise and the new office timings that actually befell them as a bolt from the blue. But to have caused that flare-up on Monday, as they did, in defiance of the standing rule against processions, rallies and noisy demonstrations at the seat of national government was an overkill one can not savour. It was untenable to the core because nowhere in the constitution of their associations is that unruly and irresponsible behaviour envisaged, or even remotely endorsed.

This is not to give the higher authorities a clean chit either. Insofar as the drastic alteration of the office hours goes, all the employees associations deserved to be consulted before effecting the same. Not merely because they numerically represented by far the largest segment of those in government employ but also because it bore portents to affect their working conditions, self-promotional activities and welfare as a whole.

On the PM's proddings for an early announcement of the Pay Commission report, the concerned official circles have stated that this would be submitted to the government by the next week. The quickening of the process is appreciated although it is advisable that all concerned have their high expectations undergo a reality check here and now in order to avoid any undue frustration at the final outcome. It is understood that the basic minimum monthly salary for a government employee is likely to be Tk. 2000 in the new structure in place of Tk. 900 as of now. But the Sangjukta Karmachari Parishad, the conglomerate of six employees associations, has put out a threat for tougher action in July if the basic minimum salary is not raised to Tk 3000 by the 1st of that month.

The government's additional requirement of Tk 2000 crore per annum to implement the new pay scales would entail a new mobilisation task in the midst of deficit financing — Tk. 1300 crore through stringent realisation of income tax and VAT and Tk 675 crore annually saved from a three-year freeze on new recruitment. All this is a very tall order.

Since a dialogue has begun between the Establishment Secretary and the service associations we see no point why the agitating secretariat employees should press on with their partial work abstention programme for the coming week.

Respect for Law

Two news items carried in this newspaper yesterday were representative of a general lack of respect for law and an increasing reliance on muscle or group power. In one such incident members of the Armed Police Battalion at Sheromoni in Khulna city attacked a Canadian-aided eye hospital, injuring 10 people — four of them seriously and damaging properties worth Tk 10 lakh, because they were denied power connection from the hospital's transformer. The other incident is about the manhandling of a magistrate by lawyers in Rajshahi, one of whose wife was expelled from an examination hall of the on-going HSC exam for adopting unfair means.

In both the cases the parties resorting to violence are people who by profession ought to be most respectful to law. It is not that one man has committed an offence on the heat of the moment. The men of the legal profession did not pause to think of the merit of the magistrate's action, instead they came in a body in support of their colleague who considered the expulsion an infringement of his privilege. Similarly, the sepoys — men in uniform — felt no qualms about their illegal demand for power connection and because they are organised and wield some power, they went berserk in around the hospital — unleashing terror.

This is not for the first time that professional groups or uniformed men have been on the side of lawlessness. When people who are supposed to be the upholders of discipline, law and social sanity take a myopic view of an issue whenever their undue interests clash with others', it is futile to expect common people to develop great respect for law. Both practitioners and enforcers are violators here. In such a situation, society should better know where the treatment is more urgently due. We all want to take advantage of our position and connection just to circumvent the rules and ethics. Unless we can do away with this attitude and submit ourselves — from the man in the street to one in the highest position — to the compliance of law and order, we will fail to establish a just and democratic society.

To Boost Tourism

Bangladesh received 10 lakh tourists last year and, according to the official version, the number has marked a steady rise all the way since 1992. This is, however, no cause for celebration. Because we all know that many of those who visit the country do so on their own and for purposes other than just sight-seeing.

The fact of the matter is that tourism is yet to develop as an industry, the plus point of which ought to be professionalism and exposition of the country in an exotic light to the world outside. On both these counts, our shortcomings are glaring. For example, the infrastructural development has not been quite up to the mark for welcoming tourists and ensuring safe, peaceful and smooth journey and accommodation for them. Maintenance of roads leading to the sites and the efforts to preserve or present the historical sites or natural spots have been somewhat half-hearted. The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation should have regular arrangements for tours to the Sundarbans.

So, there is a need for a radically changed approach to tourism in this country. Both private and government tourism can be developed by encouraging competition in terms of facilities offered. One way of vigorously going about it would be to have really active divisional or district tourism offices. But first of all we need to invest in the infrastructural development and in the promotional campaigns.

Floods in Bangladesh and the Regional Perspective

by Amjad Hossain Khan

This year also we will have floods. The question is about the intensity of flood. Chances are that we may be hit by flood of higher intensity.

BANGLADESH has an area of 144,000 Sq Km lying in the delta of the world's three great rivers — the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. These river systems drain an area of 1.72 million Sq Km in China, India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Floods in Bangladesh is a recurring phenomenon. About 60 per cent of the country is flood prone while 25 per cent of the land is inundated in monsoon in a normal year. Bangladesh experienced worst flood in 1988 when more than 60 per cent of the land was flooded and 50 per cent of the population was affected.

Floods in the South Asian region is also a regular phenomenon in Nepal and India. Flooding in South Asian region is caused by a combination of several factors:

a) Natural: Huge flows generated by rainfall occurring in a short span of time in the upstream catchment and consequent over bank spilling of the main rivers; Runoff generated by heavy local precipitation that cannot be drained out due to high stages in the outfall rivers; Land slides and glacier lake outbursts that result in high sedimentation in the rivers' courses; High tides in the Bay of Bengal coupled with windset up caused by south-westerly monsoon winds that obstruct drainage of upland discharge, and Synchronization of the peak flows of the major rivers.

b) Man Made: Deforestation in the upper catchment; Drainage congestion due to uncoordinated development activities.

Floods in South Asian region countries vary in nature, time and duration. The damage caused by floods in the three countries are colossal. In Nepal, the floods experienced in the Himalaya and the mountains are mainly due to glacier lake outburst or cloud burst, heavy precipitation and land slides. The three main

rivers, the Sapt Kosi, the Gandaki and the Karnali originate in the Himalaya are snow and glacier fed. A large part of the drainage area is covered by snow and glacier throughout the year and play a significant role in the hydrological regime of the river systems. These three rivers received monsoon floods from June to September where about 85 per cent total precipitation falls. The estimated damage due to floods and land slides has increased from US \$1 million to US \$100 million over the year.

In India, almost all the major rivers carry heavy runoff during monsoon due to intensive and heavy rainfall in their catchments. Floods in India in the Ganges Basin are caused by the three factors; inundation due to over bank spilling, erosion of river bank and changing rivers courses.

In the Brahmaputra basin serious floods occur due to physiographic conditions, meteorological situation, earth quake, land slides, erosion of rivers banks and encroachment of river areas. After the earthquake in 1950, the regime of the Brahmaputra rivers in the upper catchment changed and the depth, duration and flooded area have increased due to heavy siltation of the river bed.

Floods in India during 1954, 1962, 1966, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1994 and 1995 were very serious.

Floods in India due to monsoon generally occur from June to September. The average flood affected area in India is 7.9 million ha of which 3.69 million ha is cropped. The estimated annual loss is about US \$ 500 million.

Flooding in Bangladesh is a recurring phenomenon. The

country experienced severe floods in 1954, 1955, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1970, 1974, 1987, 1988, 1993 and 1995.

Bangladesh through its intricate network of rivers system drains a catchment of about 1.72 million Sq Km of which only 7 per cent lies in the country. Owing to the geographical location about 90 per cent of the stream flow with high sediment load from upstream passes through Bangladesh. Flood problem in the Ganges basin area in Bangladesh is mainly due to overbank spilling. The flood situation deteriorates when Brahmaputra in spate forces backwater into the Ganges.

The Ganges begin to rise in May and the period of maximum flood is in July and August. Occasionally September could be a month of severe flooding.

Flooding in Brahmaputra is characterized by large scale inundation of its banks, erosion at various places, conveyance of heavy silt load from upstream. The Meghna in the north east part of the country is controlled by high water level of the Padma during flood season.

The area prone to flood in Bangladesh is 6.14 million ha which is 42 per cent of the whole country. The loss caused by floods in a normal year is about US \$ 175 million. In extreme case, it may exceed US \$ 1 billion.

The Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna basins cover an area of 141.24 million ha of which 109.48 million ha is in India, 14 million ha in Nepal and 12.90 million ha in Bangladesh. Basin wise distribution of area in the three river basins are given below:

Ganges Basin	Nepal	14.00 mha
	India	86.14 mha
	Bangladesh	4.60 mha
		104.74 mha
Brahmaputra Basin	India	19.50 mha
	Bhutan	4.50 mha
	Bangladesh	4.70 mha
		28.70 mha
Meghna/Barak Basin	India	4.20 mha
	Bangladesh	3.60 mha
		7.80 mha
		Total 141.24 mha

Of the total area of the three river basins 62.9 per cent lies in India, 8.02 per cent in Nepal, 7.39 per cent in Bangladesh, 2.5 per cent in Bhutan and the rest in Tibet (China). The flood and drought are twin problem of the three rivers basins. Every year colossal damages occur due to flood in Nepal, India and Bangladesh.

The situation in the upper riparian countries are different from Bangladesh. Bangladesh has to give passage to the floods of all the three rivers.

Nepal's worst flood occurred in 1993 which claimed more than 2,000 lives. More than half a million cropped areas were damaged. In India worst flood occurred in 1993 in the northern part of India. The death toll was more than 1100 and it caused extensive damage to crops, homesteads and infrastructures.

The flooding in Bangladesh in 1993 caused extensive damage to crops, houses and infrastructures. About 9.3 million people were affected and 162 lives were lost.

Drought is another factor which concerns India and Bangladesh. Inadequate rainfall, climate change and short-

age of dry season flow often create drought affecting crop production.

The floods of 1995 in the northern region of Bangladesh devastated lives and properties, washed away development programmes, economic achievements and growth. It destroyed standing crops, houses and disrupted transportation. Flooding reached unprecedented level particularly in the Naogaon district in September, 1997. The flooding in 1995 between June and October affected about 32,000 Sq Km including 18,000 Sq Km in the north west region.

The Ministry of Water Resources prepared a report on Floods in North Bengal in 1955. According to the report, floods of 1955 occurred in four waves: First wave from June 13-14, second wave in July 2-20 and the third wave in August 11-16, fourth wave from September 28 to October 15.

The Floods in 1996 in Bangladesh started in June and continued till August. About 46 districts were affected. The loss of lives was 47 but crop damages, houses, livestock were extensive including heavy damage to roads and embankments.

Meteorologists of Bangladesh have noticed some deviation in the weather pattern this year from normal. They predicted higher rainfall by 20 per cent more than the normal. Bangladesh experience higher than normal rainfall at cycle of two to five years. Last year's monsoon rainfall was less.

This year also we will have floods. The question is about the intensity of flood. Chances are that we may be hit by flood of higher intensity. Floods also affect both Nepal and India in varying intensity.

Presently, each country has it plans and programmes for flood control. Long history of floods and other natural events has shown that individual efforts are not enough to mitigate floods even in their own country. There is now a greater need for regional cooperation for lasting solution of the twin problems of flood and drought.

Recent developments in improving the bilateral and regional cooperation by India, Nepal and Bangladesh is encouraging. The Indian Prime Minister during his visit to Dhaka in January, 1997, called for joint efforts to improve water management, flood control and irrigation for the benefit of the people of both countries.

The reports prepared by Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and India on flood mitigation in 1989 and 1990 are now in cold storage. It is time to look at them again with a fresh mind.

Flood is a national problem and a dialogue with Nepal, India and Bangladesh is urgently needed for a holistic development and management of the international river basins to overcome the adverse effects of floods and disasters for the benefit of millions of people in Nepal, India and Bangladesh.

The writer is former Chairman, Bangladesh Water Development Board.

Sweet and Sour Run-up to Hong Kong's Big Bang

As the last days of colonial Hong Kong ebb away, confused signals are coming from the committee planning the takeover by China. The man waiting in the wings to become Chief Administrator, Tung Chee-hwa, is pressing ahead with moves to modify laws designed to protect human rights and freedom of expression. But dissenting voices are already emerging — even from his No. 2, writes Derek Ingram from Hong Kong.

Hong Kong: one region, two councils

Preparatory Committee of 150 members, based in Beijing, is overseeing transfer of sovereignty. After the mid-1997 handover, it will replace Legislative Council - elected in 1995 - with Provisional Council, already operating as a shadow authority

British set-up

- Governor: Chris Patten
- Chief Secretary: Anson Chan
- Executive Council: 12 members
- Legislative Council: First fully-elected legislature in Hong Kong's history; 30 members from functional constituencies (business, social etc); 20 directly elected by geographical constituencies; 10 chosen by elected members of district boards



Swapping bosses: Anson Chan

Chinese set-up (after 1 July)

- Chief Executive: Tung Chee-hwa
- Administrative Secretary: Anson Chan
- Executive Council: 16 members
- Provisional Legislature: 60 members named by 40-member Selection Committee; 33 of them sit in current Legislative Council.
- Beijing says permanent new legislature will be elected in 1998

lature, to reduce the scope of the Bill of Rights, and to replace the Public Order Ordinance and societies Ordinance look like pancy attempts to stave the tide of Western-style democratic influences washing across the border.

The reasons are understandable, just as have been the reasons for the British attempt — albeit at the 11th hour — to entrench as much democratic freedom as possible in Hong Kong in the hope that some of it will stick.

Some "old china hands" in Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office have been

fiercely critical of Britain's stance on the handover. They include the former British ambassador to Beijing, Sir Alan Donald, who said recently that China had no outright objection to democracy, but was concerned that it should not be introduced much faster than on the mainland and so cause premature pressures for reform.

He said: "They were saying, 'Please don't do it at such a breakneck speed that it frightens the horse from our stables.'"

Bluster on both sides looks set to continue long past 1 July, while the businesspeople drive ahead regardless. Business eyes

now turn first to Beijing, as deals are consolidated with Chinese financial institutions.

Hong Kong has to do battle with Shanghai and other mushrooming Chinese cities, though few accept a popular argument that it will become just another Chinese city. This would be to dismiss the extraordinary dynamism of a community unlike any on the mainland, and to forget that it is coming from a different direction.

Of much greater concern — though not, it seems, to the business moguls — is the possibility of a slow erosion of free-

dom of expression. Governor Chris Patten is feeling let down. When the embarked on his democratic reforms in 1992, the business community gave him widespread support. In some what bitter speech at the end of January, he said he had faxed in his bottom drawer — "that I promised them I'll keep secret" — to prove it.

"These people had soon eaten their words," he said. "For some of them, when China beat the drum, they thought it was time to run for cover."

Patten, a former chairman of Britain's Conservative Party, has been at loggerheads with Hong Kong businesspeople for some time. He feels that the tycoons who became members of the Preparatory Committee — set up by China to arrange the takeover from Patten's Legislative Council — are helping to undermine civil liberties and democratic rights.

But it is far from certain yet that the Committee will turn out to be the Beijing poodle it is predicted to be. In a meeting in early February a split began to appear. Ten members abstained and one voted against moves to scrap 14 laws and sections of another 11.

The man who will succeed Patten in July, Chief Executive-designate Tung Chee-hwa, will have at his side two key figures from British days — his deputy, Chief Secretary Anson Chan, and a man who served four governments as a local adviser, 79-year-old Sir Sze-yuen Chung.

Chan, who is crucial in keeping the unity of the civil service, has already expressed her "disappointment" at the moves to

amend the laws. She said they sent "an extremely negative signal" to the United States, which has been telling Beijing that repeal of part of the Bill Of Rights would threaten stability.

Tung has named 12 of the 16 members of the first Executive Council, or Cabinet, that will take over on 1 July. In addition to Anson Chan, he is keeping two members of Patten's team. The rest are closely affiliated to China. Chung was named as council convener.

Compared with Patten's executive, the Council contains more professionals and is not as dominated by business people. But the Democrats, who won 19 seats in the Patten elections in 1995, have no voice.

There are signs that the Chinese are modifying their stand on some issues — for example, all serving district board and municipal council members are now likely to stay in office through the transition. Earlier, Beijing had called for these tiers of the Hong Kong political structure to be dismantled.

The British, meanwhile, are trying to ensure that their profile remains high after July. A prominently-sited \$31 million Consulate-General and British Council building has recently been opened. It will house 150 — the biggest British consulate.

Whatever that future holds, everyone is determined that British rule will go out with a bang. Hotels and airlines are booked to overflowing for June-July for tens of thousands of visitors.

As well as grand fireworks party, one attraction will be a 10,000-foot "dragon", stretching inland from the waterfront in Kowloon. The 400-strong pro-China organisers are seeking to get it into the Guinness Book of Records as the world's longest string of decorative lights.

DEREK INGRAM was Editor of Gemini News Service for 28 years and is now Consultant Editor.

To the Editor...

Cyclone

Sir, As I witnessed the cyclones of '91 and '97 personally, my mind has worked to compare two cyclones. Both of them whipped us and left trail of devastation. Cyclone of '91 hit Chittagong city at night and at high tide. It was like a doomsday and my feeling was as if I boarded a ship trembling over rolling of waves. Chittagong city was under blackout for several days. Telephone connection outside city remained disconnected for many days. TV viewing had been made possible after 30 days of cyclone. Loss of human lives, livestock, cattle, poultry, betel leaf farms and standing crop were immense. Thatched houses and infrastructure, mainly embankments, were damaged immensely. Catastrophe was significant for surge of the sea water that acted as catalyst to all mishaps. Awareness was presumably nil among the people and pre-disaster preparation was not much. Information of damages after cyclone nearby Chittagong was not readily available.

The '91 cyclone taught us many lessons. Awareness among the people living in low-lying areas and adjoining the sea was raised after '91 cyclone. As a result, post-disaster management of '97 was abundant that has attenuated loss of lives and property. As '97 cyclone occurred at day and at low tide, extent of pre disaster manage-

ment and awareness among people could not be tested. Time of whipping in '97 was at low tide that did prevent in causing surge of sea water. It might be the main reason for less toll of lives. Information access in '97 is easier than it was in '91.

Disaster brings honey for a few and misery for many. This year, affected people need houses and safe drinking water. We can think how the structure of houses would be in this coastal area as this is vulnerable to recurring cyclone. Now, it is also high time to evaluate our past mistakes. Cyclone occurred in the coastal area from time immemorial but natural protection like mangroves used to save lives and properties from elemental devastations. Rampant shrimp cultivation and salt field development have uprooted traditional livelihood and destroyed natural protection like mangroves. We should think comprehensively without fail to build this area coping with recurring cyclone and surge.

It is 1979, not 1969  
Sir, I draw your kind attention to your editorial under the caption "Significant Verdict" dated 26th May, 1997. So far I know, the present Islamic Gov-

ernment of Iran came to power in 1979 and not in 1969. Mohd Lakiottullah 3-G Hope Apt. 21, Siddheswari Road Dhaka-1217

To save the mankind

Sir, It refers to a letter in this regard by Shaikh Mahub Ahmed published in The Daily Star on 4/4/97. It is really very heartening to know that the Foundation for Moral Development Approach (FMDA) has floated a universally benevolent proposal to the UN on "Global Moral Development for World Peace". The aim of the FMDA is to raise moral awareness and stir the conscience among the world's peoples through its universal moral development approach. The FMDA has rightly taken up this timely step as a package-deal programme to curb and combat all the fatal problems of world today like corruption, AIDS, poverty, violation of human rights, environment pollution, oppression on women, terrorism, drug abuses, smoking, etc., as all these problems are the simple by-products of immoral human activities of multifarious nature.

There is no doubt that today or tomorrow, the world population, for the sake of its peaceful survival, will have to follow the guidelines of this global moral development programme of the

FMDA. We really feel proud that such a unique and universally benevolent moral development issue has emerged from Bangladesh and we wholeheartedly congratulate the initiators of the organisation for propagating such a noble idea in the greater welfare of mankind.

Mrs. Kanti Barua President, Human Welfare Society Bakalia, Chittagong

Increasing beds in hospitals

Sir, My mother is now in city for treatment and she has been admitted to the IPGMR. She came (with my father) to Dhaka almost 20 days ago. Without wasting time, we went to IPGMR for a bed but the authorities, despite their best efforts, failed to provide a single bed. For this, we had to wait a long time. I don't think that it was a failure of the authority. They deserve thanks because they maintained the rules and regulations. They did not even care to the appeal of ministers for their relatives. The man coming earlier prior to other patients and having patience only can claim a bed at the IPGMR. The rest will have to wait until a bed is vacant.

My earnest request goes to the Ministry for Public Health and to the authorities of IPGMR to increase the numbers of beds so that the deprived patients

can have treatment with ease and comfort and thus be able to save both money and their valuable time. Otherwise the talk-talks of "Health for All" will never come to be true.

Once again, my heartfelt congratulations go to the authorities of IPGMR for following strict discipline. Srikha Akhtar 108, Str A F Rahman Hall Dhaka University

UN, Washington and Baghdad

Sir, It appears that Iraq, one of the oldest civilisations in the world and the USA, the self-proclaimed greatest civilisation on earth after the end of the Cold War do not see eye to eye.

Kuwait has been freed from the forceful occupation of Iraq in 1991 but the UN economic sanction against Iraq continues for an indefinite period and the sufferings of the people of Iraq know no bounds.

It is said that UN economic sanction against Iraq would be lifted only after the UN inspector for Rouse Ekeus certifies that Baghdad has destroyed all its weapons of mass destruction. Over last six years Rolf Ekeus and his team of experts with full cooperation of many international agencies and loaded logistic support from the US has been searching and ex-

ploring every nook and corner of Iraq for the widely publicised hidden weapons.

But we wonder in this advanced age of computer, science and technology, secret photography, satellite communications and what not when the US Geological Survey in Golden Colorado can report earthquake with a magnitude of 7.3 which hit thousands of miles away near Quetta in Pakistan with a twinkle of an eye and the Voice of America can broadcast the news within a few minutes, why the UN Special Commission on Disarming Iraq (UNSCOM) which is spending US \$ 100,000 a day for weapons monitoring in Iraq has so far failed to prove anything concrete about the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and Ekeus has been repeatedly issuing incomplete, inconsistent and repugnant reports and rumours about Iraqi weapons, following a dilly-dally tactics and throwing the people of Iraq into the abyss of untold sufferings?

We would request the UN Secretary-General to reveal the existence of the world organisation operative, workable effectively and efficiently consistent with the aims, objectives and Charter of the UN and also in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. O H Kabir 6, Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203